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Mellow: Social Stigmas Unjustly

"As far as a lifestyle, where better can you want to raise a family than in Northeastern Pennsylvania?"

(This is the third of a four-part series of an interview with state Sen. Robert J. Mellow by Scranton Times-Sunday Times Regional Editor Bob Gelik focusing on how state policies affect local communities.)

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TIMES: Have you taken any specific steps to encourage industries to locate in this area?

MELLOW: No, but we've tried specific steps. We have tried to work with a number of different groups of relocation into the area. The convenient excuse that we get from people is they can't locate in Northeastern Pennsylvania becaue the tax climate is not satisfactory to corporate employment. Yet they are many of the same industries that will locate in Montgomery County, in suburban Philadelphia, in Bucks County, or they'd even locate at the Allentown, Bethlehem, Lehigh area or even walk to Western Pennsylvania.

If you look at Allegheny County, *Fortune* magazine will tell you that a large percentage of the top corporations in the United States are headquartered in Allegheny County. The corporate taxes in Pennsylvania are the same in Philadelphia, in Bucks, in Montgomery, in Lackawanna, in Luzerne, it doesn't matter where.

Unfortunately we are living with two stigmas that we have not been able to shed. Number one, is . . . people have considered us to be the coal miners of the area and that we've been living with the sins of the coal barons of 50, 60 years ago. Although today they're not here.

We have spent a tremendous amount of money to try to stabalize the underground, to extinguish burning culm dumps, to evade acid mine water. We have spent a lot of money to do this, to try to present once again, a brighter picture to prospective industries coming in here. The local chamber of commerece, I think, is an outstanding group in the development of industrial parks, and I believe it's starting to pay off.

We are also living with the sins of people saying that Northeastern Pennsylvania is a very difficult place because of its high concentration of unionized people.

Once again, I don't believe that. I think that's a fallacy, and that might have been the case, once again, a number of years ago, but it is certainly not the case today.

I believe today that our people here can provide the same kind of services that people in any part of the state can provide — that we have the technology to do that; that our learning institutions of higher learning are as good as you'll find anywhere in the commonwealth.

As far as a lifestyle, where better can you want to raise a family than in Northeastern Pennsylvania where you have the change of season, which is beautiful, gives you anything you want. And I believe that's the positive aspect that will eventually turn this entire area over to having industrialized people come in.

TIMES: Have you had any involvement with the efforts to bring Steamtown to this area?

MELLOW: Only to the point where I've discussed it with the mayor, very, very briefly. But that's a proposal that's being developed through the community devel-